

Readings: [Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time | USCCB](#)

I know what you are thinking... “Nice try, Fr. Carlos, you set these readings up! Just when we are in the middle of stewardship, ‘coincidentally’ we happen to hear about two poor widows who give all they have in generosity, about putting money in the temple basket!”

Well, you are wrong! Yes, one of the themes in the readings is generosity, and I will touch on that for sure, but in a different way. Let’s dive right in, what is going on?

Well, remember that Mark is wrapping it up. As we get near the end of the gospel and near the end of ordinary time, Mark is bringing all the past content together.

In this case, he is criticizing the pharisees for *devouring* the houses of widows. The word “devouring” is the same word used in the parable of the Sower chapter 4, where some seeds that fell on the path were devoured by the birds, the birds being a symbol of Satan. So, Jesus is making a criticism of how the pharisees are being Satan because they are taking advantage, devouring, the poor widow who was forced to give all she had that day.

This passage is often read as if she was a hero, and example of generosity, but she is no hero, she is a victim of the selfishness of the pharisees who let her give all she has so that they could continue to live their lavish lifestyle.

It parallels well with the first reading where we also hear about a widow and Elijah. It takes place during a drought and famine, and not

mentioned in that scene is King Ahab, the king of Israel at that time, considered one of the worst kings in their history because he too failed to take care of the poor. So, the drought and famine was thought of being brought about by God through Elijah as divine judgement to get the king to realize the neglect of his actions, his lack of generosity. Jesus gives the pharisees the same judgement, which comes to them when the temple is ransacking and destroyed by the roman empire a few years later.

So, in both instances, though the focus seems to be the generosity of the two widows, the focus is actually on the lack of generosity of the leaders, the king on the first, the pharisees on the second.

To put it in modern terms, Jesus is criticizing unfair, unjust, selfish policies, the kind that neglect the poor, devours their lives, while others continue to get rich, something that happens in all areas of life, like when governments or companies don't care to exploit their workers just so they make a greater profit.

It happens in religious context often too. In the time of Jesus, people had to come to the temple to be cleansed from their sin, to be blessed by God, and if the poor were the ones desiring blessings, then they were the ones willing to give it all. That is what the Pharisees are capitalizing on, the desperation of the poor. It is a tempting business model: the more you give, the more blessings you receive from God! The more health and wealth you will have.

It is a common and tempting way of thinking, especially among some evangelical megachurches like Joel Osteen because it does make

people give more money to the church. They read the gospel wrong, Jesus said “go and be a prophet” not “go and make a profit.”

Brief little example: a few years ago, Pastor Dollar (yes, ironically Dollar is his actual last name) was in the news because he told the congregation to ask God for great blessings. What kinds of blessings? Well, he tells them:

“Dream for the best house, dream for the best car... just cus the world don’t have it don’t mean you can’t have it!” And what did Pastor Dollar ask for himself? He said *“If I want to believe God can bless me with a \$65 million dollar plane, you cannot stop me! You cannot stop me from dreaming!”*¹ Then he asked his huge congregation to give a contribution of \$300 or more each so they could buy him this private jet and he could travel easier to do his ministry and spread God’s blessing! In turn, God would bless those who contributed with health and prosperity in their own lives, and people were on board... they gave!

What did I learn from this example? That I think I’m a pastor in the wrong church! Kidding....

In all seriousness, it is so easy to take advantage of generosity, which is why Jesus is presenting it in these harsh terms of how people take advantage of others.

The call is to be generous in all areas of our lives: with how we manage our household, with making time for building our relationships, with prayer, with our natural resources, with our education, our work responsibilities.

In the context of this month here at church, we are asked to be generous with time talent and treasure, not because the more we give the

more God will bless us, but because God has already blessed us. Paul reminds us of that in Hebrews – that Jesus Christ has offered himself generously so that we might have life. Our giving is nothing but a response to that.

That means we who are receiving funds have to be responsible not to take advantage of you. We all know the church and money have not had the healthiest of relationships, money does tend to corrupt the heart, so I understand some people are hesitant to give because of that. To safeguard against the temptation to devour and take advantage of your offering, we have a finance council to help us discern how to best use the money for the better of each member of the community. We share with you're the breakdown of income vs spending on our annual report. The gospel today fits us all.

As we enter the season of giving... thanksgiving, Christmas... we will be presented with opportunities for generosity all over the place. We are asked if we want to round up to the nearest dollar for our purchase, if we want to donate to this and that charity... to drop in a couple of bucks in the red salvation army bucket at the grocery store, to participate in food and clothing drives, for some we might be asked to be generous in giving of our time and energy for large family gatherings and dinners, which might be a difficult task especially if that uncle who tends to bring up politics and religion is there.

In which ever ways we decide to be generous, be sure you are not being taken advantage of, or that you are not the one taking advantage, devouring, others. As Christians, authentic generosity comes from the

greatest commandment to love God, so let's always find ways to truly love one another as Christ has loved us.

I now would like to invite Dwaine to please come up and share with us how stewardship has impacted his own family life.

Thank you so much, Dwaine, and thank all of you who have submitted your pledge cards. If you have already submitted yours, you will receive in the mail thank you letter with a cool little parish magnet for your fridge as a little token of our gratitude. If you have not submitted your pledge card because you forgot or are still unsure, you will also receive a little reminder letter which will also contain the fridge magnet. You can use it to hold your pledge card on your fridge at eye-sight, so you do not forget it! See I am very considerate. We have two more weeks to get them in.

Finally, I created a little fun video for you which has been shared via flock note, Facebook and YouTube. Please watch it if you have not yet done so. You can also access it directly at the front page of our new parish website by going to www.holyspiritkent.org. In case it is of any incentive, Noah, the new puppy makes a debut.

+ *Fr. Carlos*